

# FAMILY VIOLENCE

## POLICING INITIATIVES



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SOLICITOR GENERAL



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# **FAMILY VIOLENCE POLICING INITIATIVES**

## **ALBERTA SOLICITOR GENERAL**

Violence in the home strikes at the heart of society. A child who lives in a home where a parent is abused carries this lesson of violence into adulthood. Anyone who lives in a violent home experiences a loss - the one place where she should feel safe and secure is a place of danger.

Family violence has been viewed as a social problem and as a family problem. In fact, it is a crime which mandates criminal justice intervention. An individual who assaults his spouse is no less a criminal than an individual who assaults a stranger on the street. A victim of family violence is entitled to the maximum protection from harm or abuse as permitted by law.

The Solicitor General who is responsible for policing in Alberta, is committed to taking a leadership role with respect to law enforcement and crime prevention initiatives in the area of family violence. The police are usually the first and sometimes the only agency called upon to intervene in incidents of family violence, therefore it is imperative that they are able to respond efficiently and humanely.

Police services in Alberta have worked diligently to respond to calls of family violence in a humane, caring manner. Many have developed Victim Services Units to assist victims during their crisis. The Chiefs of Police and the Chairpersons of the Police Commissions have cooperatively worked with the Solicitor General to develop these initiatives to enhance the present police practices.

These initiatives are designed to address the crime of spousal abuse.

The primary goals of the Solicitor General's family violence policing initiatives are:

- *To reduce the incidence of family violence through early police intervention*
- *To increase public awareness of the criminal nature of family violence.*

In order to achieve these goals, a medium range time frame has been established. In this regard, it is projected that after three years of operation, the family violence policing initiatives of the Solicitor General will have accomplished the following:

# FAMILY VIOLENCE POLICING INITIATIVE

## ALBERTA SOLICITOR GENERAL

Violence in the home affects the fabric of society. A child who lives where a parent is abused grows the fabric of violence into adulthood who lives in a violent home experiences a risk - the one close where that risk and danger is a place of danger.

Family violence has been viewed as a social problem and as a crime in fact, it is a crime which involves criminal justice intervention. An individual who causes his spouse to feel a threat to his physical safety is a danger to the spouse. A victim of family violence is entitled to the protection from harm or abuse as provided by law.

The Solicitor General who is responsible for policing in Alberta is also a leader in the field with respect to law enforcement and while a leader in the field of family violence. The police are usually the first responders to the police called upon to intervene in incidents of family violence. Initiative 2 is intended to help the police in their role.

Police services in Alberta have worked diligently to respond to cases of family violence in a humane, caring manner. They have developed strategies to assist victims during their calls. The Chief of Police and the Solicitor General to develop these initiatives to enhance the present practices.

These initiatives are designed to address the crime of sexual assault. The primary goal of the Solicitor General's family violence policing initiative is:

- To reduce the incidence of family violence through law enforcement.
- To increase public awareness of the criminal nature of violence.

In order to achieve these goals, a multi-faceted strategy has been developed. In the report it is suggested that after three years of implementation, the Solicitor General will have the following:

- (a) Established uniform police guidelines for charging, intervention, referrals and training.
- (b) Established an advisory committee with representatives from municipal police, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the judiciary, the Departments of the Attorney General and Solicitor General, and Alberta Council of Women's Shelters.
- (c) Provided enhanced training to police instructors, recruits, senior constables and management.
- (d) Reduced the incidence of injuries to victims and police.
- (e) Increased public awareness of the criminal nature of the problem.
- (f) Increased public awareness that help is available for victims.
- (g) Provided immediate assistance and protection to victims of family violence.
- (h) Reduced repeat calls and police time spent on family violence incidents.
- (i) Improved the satisfaction of victims and police with the quality of services provided by police when intervening in conflicts.
- (j) Established a mechanism for collecting and processing police and court data on the incidence of family violence.
- (k) Developed and distributed educational material.
- (l) Established family violence as a priority police response.
- (m) Increased the availability of legal advice for victims.
- (n) Increased the strength and enforcement of peace bonds and restraining orders.
- (o) Developed an effective partnership with the media.

This paper discusses the proposed initiatives under the following headings:

**Enforcement**

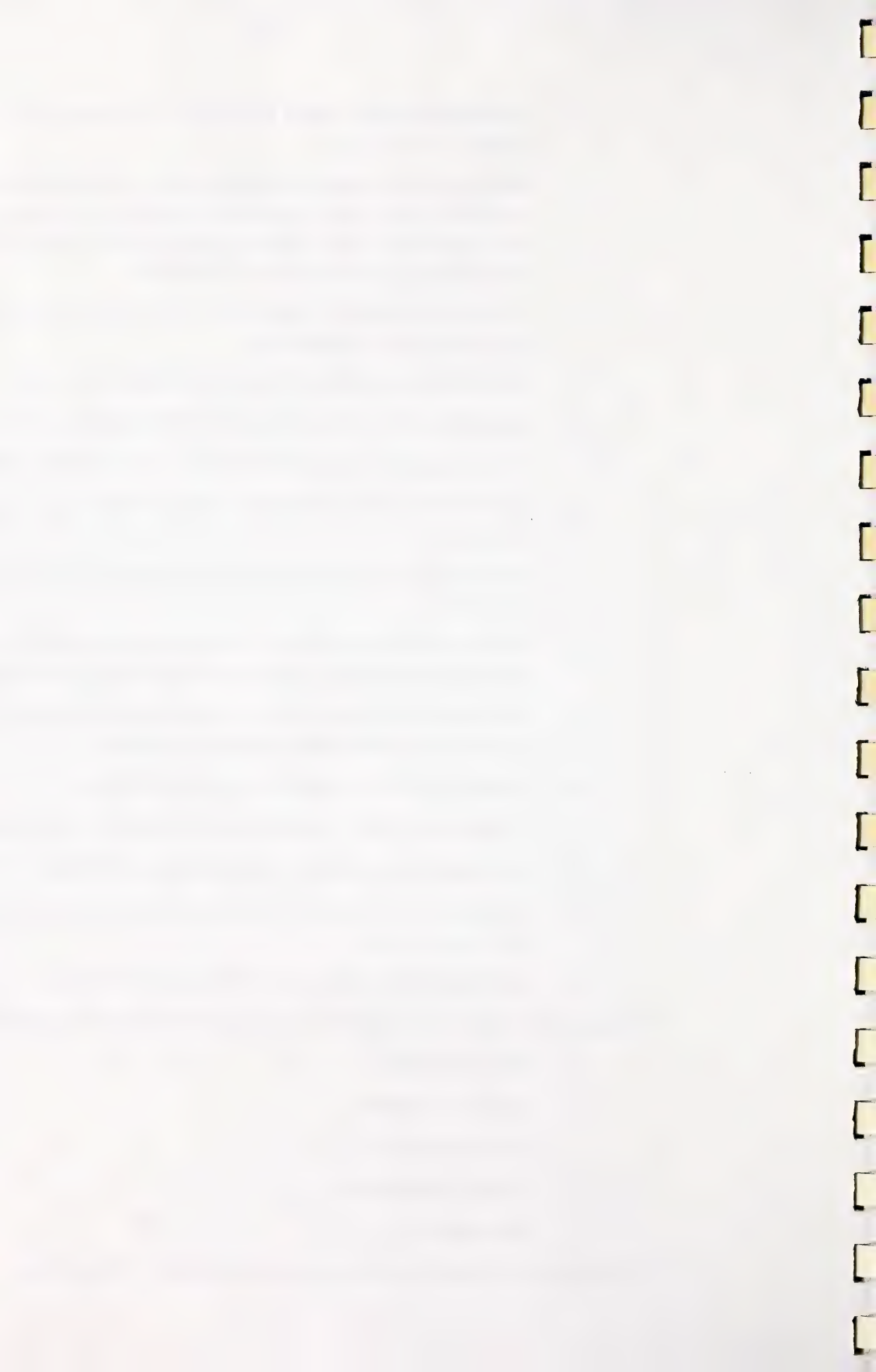
**Police Education**

**Victim Support**

**Public Awareness**

**Research**

Following are the objectives and strategies for each of these areas.





# **ENFORCEMENT**

## **A. Introduction**

An approach which emphasizes appropriate police response is being adopted to reduce the incidence of family violence. This primarily preventive approach is based on experience and research showing that early police intervention results in a significant decrease in the level of violence in the home. A strict policy to lay a charge where reasonable and probable grounds exist is supported as it has been proven that arrest with appropriate follow up is the most effective deterrent when dealing with abusers who commit acts of violence in the home.

## **B. Objectives**

- Lessen the number of repeat calls due to early police intervention.
- Send a message to the abuser that family violence is a crime.
- Provide assurance to victims that the police and courts will enforce the law.
- Decrease the abuser's ability to pressure the victim to drop charges.

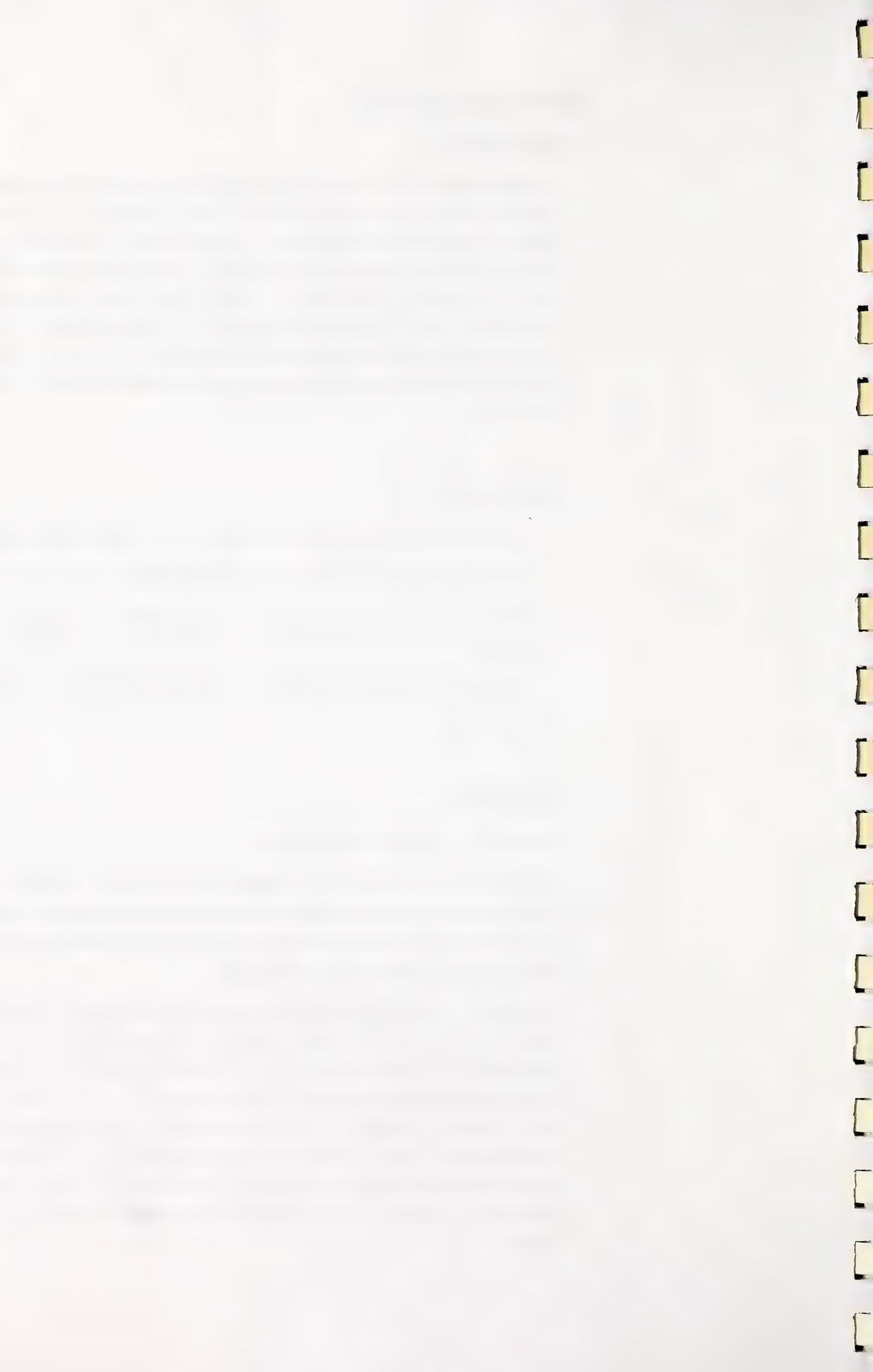
## **C. Initiatives**

### **Strategy I - Uniform Guidelines**

The intent of this initiative is to establish a uniform policy for the response to investigations of family violence complaints, and to reaffirm the police officer's responsibility to respond in accordance with traditional probable cause standards.

Guidelines of minimum standards will be developed for incorporation into the policy of each Police Service. The guidelines will include a directive of the Department of the Attorney General stating that a charge should always be laid where the police officer has reasonable and probable grounds to believe an assault has taken place. The guidelines will outline definitions, the authority of the police to arrest or issue appearance notices, as well as the need to assist the victim in obtaining immediate medical attention or transportation to a safe place.





The guidelines will provide for the police to give a victim a referral card detailing legal information, emergency numbers and community agencies. The guidelines will require that Police Services complete a report on all family violence calls.

The guidelines are designed to ensure that victims of family violence will be protected, and inform the public that violence in the home is a crime and will not be tolerated.

Distribution - October, 1990

### **Strategy II - Mandatory Reporting**

In the literature on family violence many statistics are quoted relating to the nature and incidence of family violence. Police are often the subject of criticism for their response to this crime. This criticism is voiced without the benefit of proper research.

In order to get an accurate picture of the incidence and police response police services will be requested to have reports completed on all family violence calls. These reports should contain information regarding the use of weapons, alcohol, drugs, age of victim, relationship between victim and abuser, medical attention required, charges laid, and referrals made to community resources.

Police Services will be requested to submit data on a quarterly basis to the Department of Solicitor General for research purposes.

### **Strategy III - Peace Bonds and Restraining Orders**

The present system to obtain peace bonds and restraining orders is confusing and expensive for victims of family violence. Victims have reported that these orders often do not provide the necessary protection. Discussions will take place with the Department of the Attorney General to ensure peace bonds and restraining orders contain a condition restricting the abuser from having contact with the victim.

The police are often not aware of the existence of these orders when they respond to a home. The feasibility of having copies of all bonds and orders issued available to the police will be explored.

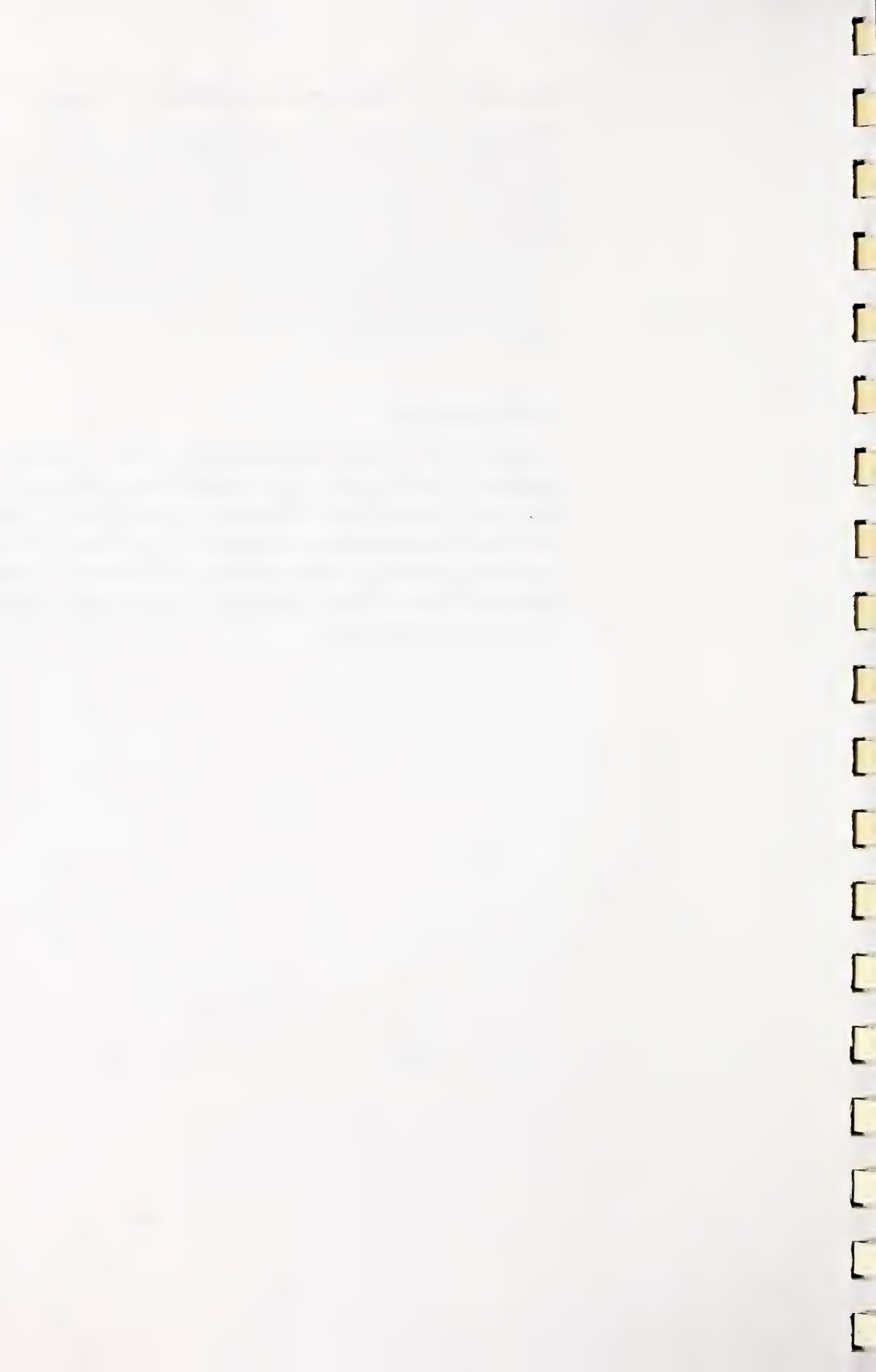


## **Strategy IV - Compulsory Counselling for Batterers**

Enhanced police intervention must be followed up by Crown Prosecutors to ensure charges proceed through court and that offenders receive treatment. Liaison with the Department Attorney General will inform Crown Prosecutors of the police initiatives and request cooperation. The importance of asking for a counselling condition on probation orders when addressing sentences for individuals charged with assault as a result of a family violence incident will be stressed.

## **D. Conclusion**

Family violence is a crime which calls for police intervention. Research and evaluation support early police intervention and the laying of a charge where reasonable and probable grounds exist. The enforcement initiatives are designed to reduce the incidence of family violence by sending a strong message to the abuser that family violence is a crime which can result in charges laid and strict sentences being imposed





## **II. POLICE EDUCATION**

### **A. Introduction**

In more than 90% of all homicides which occur as a result of family violence, police have previously attended the residence for family violence disputes. In more than 50% of all family violence homicides, police have previously attended five or more times for family violence disputes. The police are the only 24 hour, free, immediate service that provides intervention in family violence disputes, therefore it is imperative that police receive proper training, education and support in order to appropriately deal with the situation and assist families.

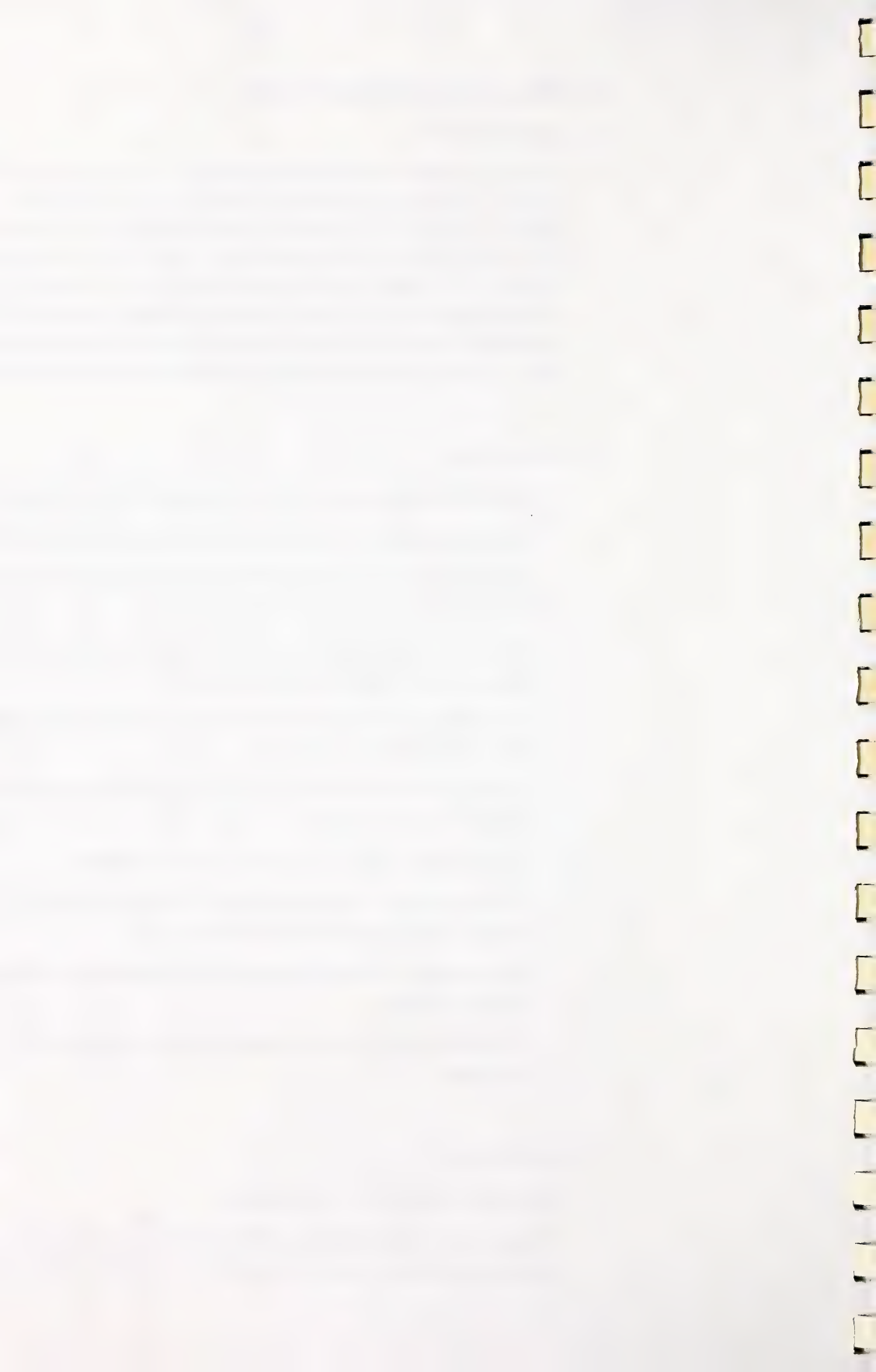
### **B. Objectives**

- To sensitize the police to the dynamics of family violence.
- To assist police with learning appropriate methods of intervention.
- To familiarize the police with the research supporting strict enforcement of a charging policy.
- To reinforce the responsibility and authority of the police in responding to calls of family violence.
- To familiarize the police with the needs of the victim and community services available.
- To reduce the likelihood of injury to the police and victim through skilled crisis intervention.
- To assist the police in identifying signs of abuse.
- To solicit support from all levels of the police services to treat family violence as a serious criminal act.
- To recognize police officers who demonstrate good human relations skills.
- To assist police in making referrals to appropriate community agencies.

### **C. Initiatives**

#### **Strategy I - Advisory Committee**

An advisory committee comprised of representatives from the municipal police services, the police commissions, the Royal Canadian



Mounted Police, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, and the Departments of the Attorney General and Solicitor General will be established.

The mandate of the advisory committee will be to:

- Identify what gaps/problems exist in the present response to family violence.
- Establish police priorities for improvement to identified gaps/problems.
- Approve the intent and design of initiatives.
- Monitor the implementation of initiatives.

Meetings will be held with committee members on an individual as well as group basis.

Staff of the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, the Women's Secretariat and the Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence will be asked for direction and assistance to support the police initiatives.

## **Strategy II - Police Training**

Training lesson plans will be developed to prepare police officers to deal with crisis intervention and conflict management relating to family violence. Proper training can have dramatic results for police services in that it can reduce the time spent on family violence calls and promote greater safety for the attending officers. A major focus will be on sensitizing police to the needs of the victim, as well as the frustrations experienced by police when the victim refuses to testify, charges are dropped, or lenient sentences are imposed. Training sessions will include a panel discussion with a victim, a batterer, a police officer, a crown prosecutor and a judge.

Three distinct training sessions will be designed for:

- (1) *Police instructors*
- (2) *Recruits*
- (3) *Senior constables and police managers*

This program will commence with the training of the police instructors at the Solicitor General Staff College. The lesson plans for the recruits, senior constables and management will be distributed to police instructors prior to the course, with each assigned an area to



teach. Sessions will be video taped for feedback purposes. The police instructors course will include different methods of instructions, group discussions, moderating panels and soliciting response from the class.

These instructors will then be responsible for providing in-house training sessions to recruits, senior constables and senior managers in their respective police services. When and how this training will be delivered will be the prerogative of each Chief of Police.

### **Strategy III - Booklet - A Guide for Police Officers**

A booklet, "A Guide for Police Officers", will be distributed to all police officers. This booklet, designed as a quick reference, is intended to help police understand the dynamics of family violence. It will outline the myths and facts about family violence, the kinds of abuse, the cycle of violence the profile of the abuser and victim, the reasons why a victim stays in the relationship, the impact of the children, and what the victim needs from the police.

### **Strategy IV - Family Violence Newsletter**

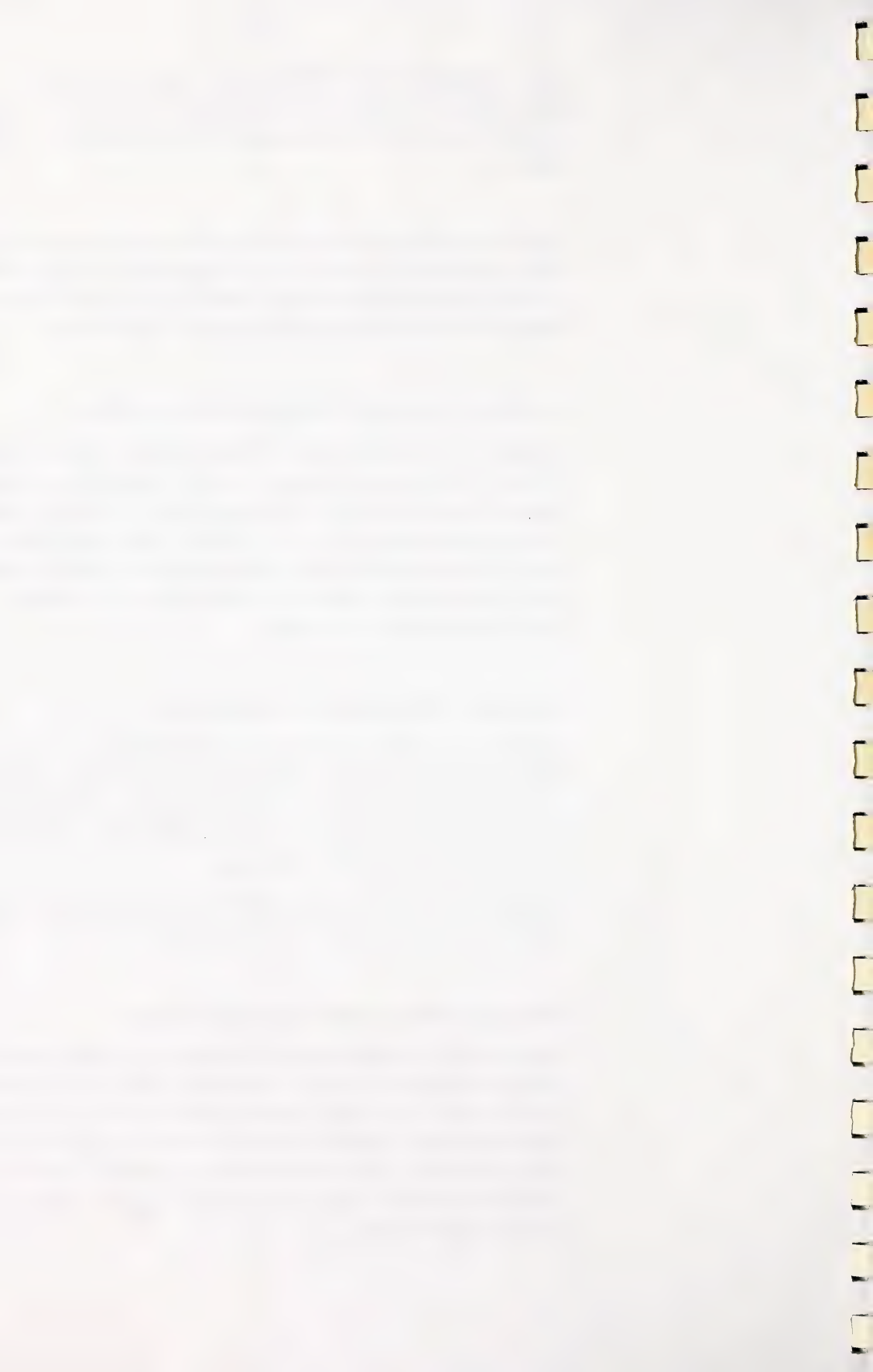
In order to provide police with ongoing information on programs in other jurisdictions, research, legal decisions and program evaluations, a family violence newsletter will be prepared and distributed by the Law Enforcement Division. The first newsletter will introduce the policing initiatives and their objectives.

Newsletters, produced on a quarterly basis, will be designed for posting on bulletin boards in police stations.

### **Strategy V - Recognition of Police Officers**

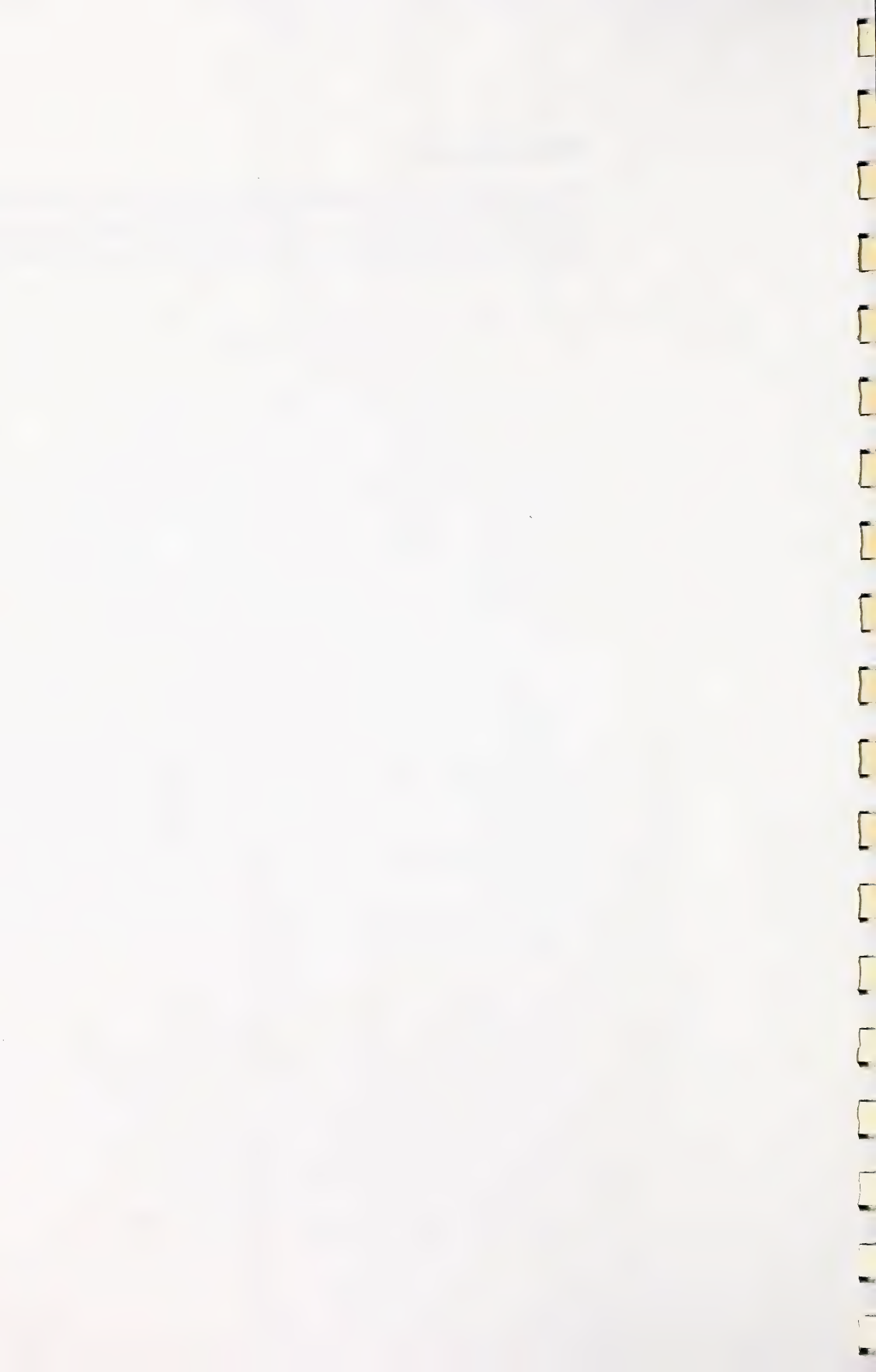
Recent trends in policing have focused on community based policing and problem solving policing. With this in mind, police services will be encouraged to recognize police officers in performance appraisals for community work, good human relations skills, proper crisis intervention and appropriate referrals to community agencies. This will reinforce to police officers that dealing with people in a family violence crisis is important police work.





## **D. Conclusion**

These initiatives are designed to enhance present police practices in the area of family violence. Good intervention begins with proper training, solid information and strong support from the police services.



### **III. VICTIM SUPPORT**

#### **A. Introduction**

Victims of family violence are uniquely isolated as they become victims at the hands of the person they love. These victims wrestle with feelings of fear, loyalty, love, guilt and shame. Victims are torn between the desire to shield and help a loved one, and their fear for their own safety and the safety of their children.

#### **B. Objectives**

- Support the victim through the court process to increase the likelihood of successful prosecution.
- Ensure victims are dealt with in a humane caring manner.
- Increase the victim's satisfaction with the police response.
- Advise victims of the services available in the community.

#### **C. Initiatives**

##### **Strategy I - Crisis Intervention Strategies**

When responding to a family violence call, police are responsible for protecting the victim and enforcing the law. Victims may require a variety of assistance to meet their immediate needs for safety, medical treatment, housing, transportation and information about community resources.

In addition to taking any legal action, guidelines will address the police officers responsibility to:

- Secure medical treatment for victims.
- Ensure the safety of children.
- Remain on the scene until satisfied that there is no threat to the victim.
- Standby to ensure safety if the victim is removing personal property.
- Provide the victim with information on community resources (family violence referral card).
- Arrange or provide transportation to a shelter or safe place.





## **Strategy II - Family Violence Referral Cards**

Victims of family violence often feel isolated and are not aware that they have alternatives. In order to provide a quick source of information, a referral card outlining legal information, emergency numbers and community agencies will be designed for police officers to provide to the victim. This card will also contain the police file number and the badge number of the responding officers, so that the victim can access information regarding the status of any charges laid.

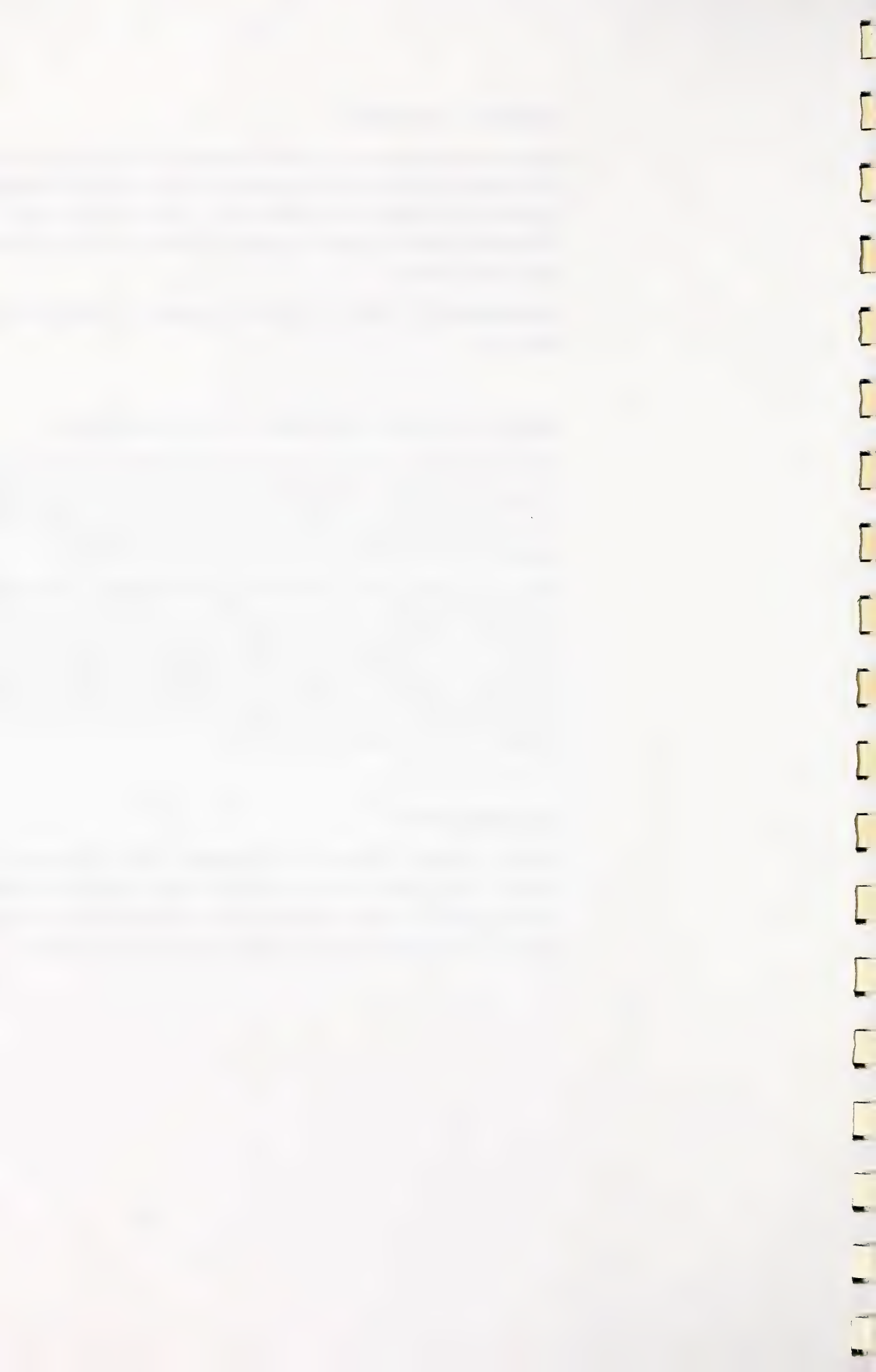
## **Strategy III - Booklet - Victims of Family Violence - Information & Rights**

As previously stated, victims lack information about alternatives, police assistance, court procedures and community services. A booklet designed as an information resource for victims will be developed, focusing on rights and responsibilities. This booklet will indicate the incidence of family violence, kinds of abuse, the cycle of violence, reasons why women stay, the impact on the children, the reason for police intervention, what the victim can expect from the police, the court process and protective orders.

## **Strategy IV - Weekly Call Backs**

There are many different scenarios when police respond to calls of family violence. In some situations a charge is laid, an arrest is made and the offender is placed in custody. In some situations a charge is laid and the offender is given an appearance notice. In other situations there are no reasonable grounds to lay a charge, and the police defuse the situation and leave. In other situations the police may do some mediation with the couple. In other situations the police may provide the victim with transportation to a safe place.

Regardless of what actions are required, police services will be asked to develop a practice whereby a representative from the police service would call the victim approximately one week after the incident to ensure safety and to answer any questions in regard to court proceedings. This will be an opportunity for the police officer to inform the victim of the progress of the case in court, to detect pressures brought on the victim to request withdrawal of the charges, and to encourage the victim to see the case through court.



### **Strategy V - Legal Aid**

Ontario has developed a system whereby free emergency legal advice is available to victims of family violence. Shelters and related agencies can refer victims directly to a lawyer for one hour of emergency advice concerning legal issues which may require immediate action.

The feasibility of setting up a similar system for Alberta will be explored.

### **Strategy VI - Victims Services - Court Preparation**

Presently Victim Services Units are operated by the Edmonton, Calgary and Medicine Hat municipal police services and by Grande Prairie, Red Deer, Fort McMurray, Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, and Leduc Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachments.

With the passing of the Victim Program Assistance Act and the establishment of the Victim Program Services Unit, it is hoped that victims can be provided information on the court process, i.e., status of charge, court dates, questions to be prepared to answer, and emotional support. Victims will be provided with the opportunity to complete Victim Impact Statements.

## **D. Conclusion**

Victims of family violence must be dealt with in a humane caring manner. They often lack information on their rights and the criminal justice system. Initiatives designed to educate and serve victims will assist in empowering them to better their living situations.



## **IV. PUBLIC AWARENESS**

### **A. Introduction**

Most Albertans are aware that family violence occurs in their community, however many perceive it as a private family matter. An awareness campaign is required to inform the public that family violence is a crime, and to mobilize them to participate in its prevention.

### **B. Objectives**

- Inform the public that family violence is a crime.
- Maintain a high level of public awareness of family violence.
- Advise victims and any parties aware of an assault occurring to call the police.
- Develop an effective partnership with the media.

### **C. Initiatives**

#### **Strategy I - News Release to Launch Initiatives**

In conjunction with the Chairman of the Chiefs of Police and the Chairman of the Alberta Association of Municipal Police Commissions, the Solicitor General will hold a news conference to announce the family violence policing initiatives.

For this news release, an extensive media package with details on long and short term strategies will be prepared. It will contain a fact sheet on family violence as well as copies of booklets prepared for distribution.

#### **Strategy II - Radio**

In conjunction with the Women's Secretariat and the Office For The Prevention of Family Violence, a proposal will be drafted for a media campaign depicting the message that "Family Violence Is a Crime: If You Have Been Assaulted - Call the Police".

The recommended method to follow would be a continuous low level campaign for one year. The feasibility of public service announcements will be explored.





### **Strategy III - Newspapers**

The same message will be presented in neighbourhood, ethnic and major newspapers. Feature articles will be prepared as a mechanism to maintain interest in the initiatives.

### **Strategy IV - Billboards**

The "Family Violence is a Crime: If You Have Been Assaulted Call the Police" message will be presented on billboards. This strategy is utilized to provide a constant message to the public.

### **Strategy V - Brochures & Posters**

Materials will be prepared for distribution by police services during Crime Prevention Week, Law Week and Family Violence Prevention Month.

They will also be displayed in police stations, women's shelters, Crown Prosecutors' offices, court locations, hospitals, women's centres, grocery stores, churches, post offices and other locations.

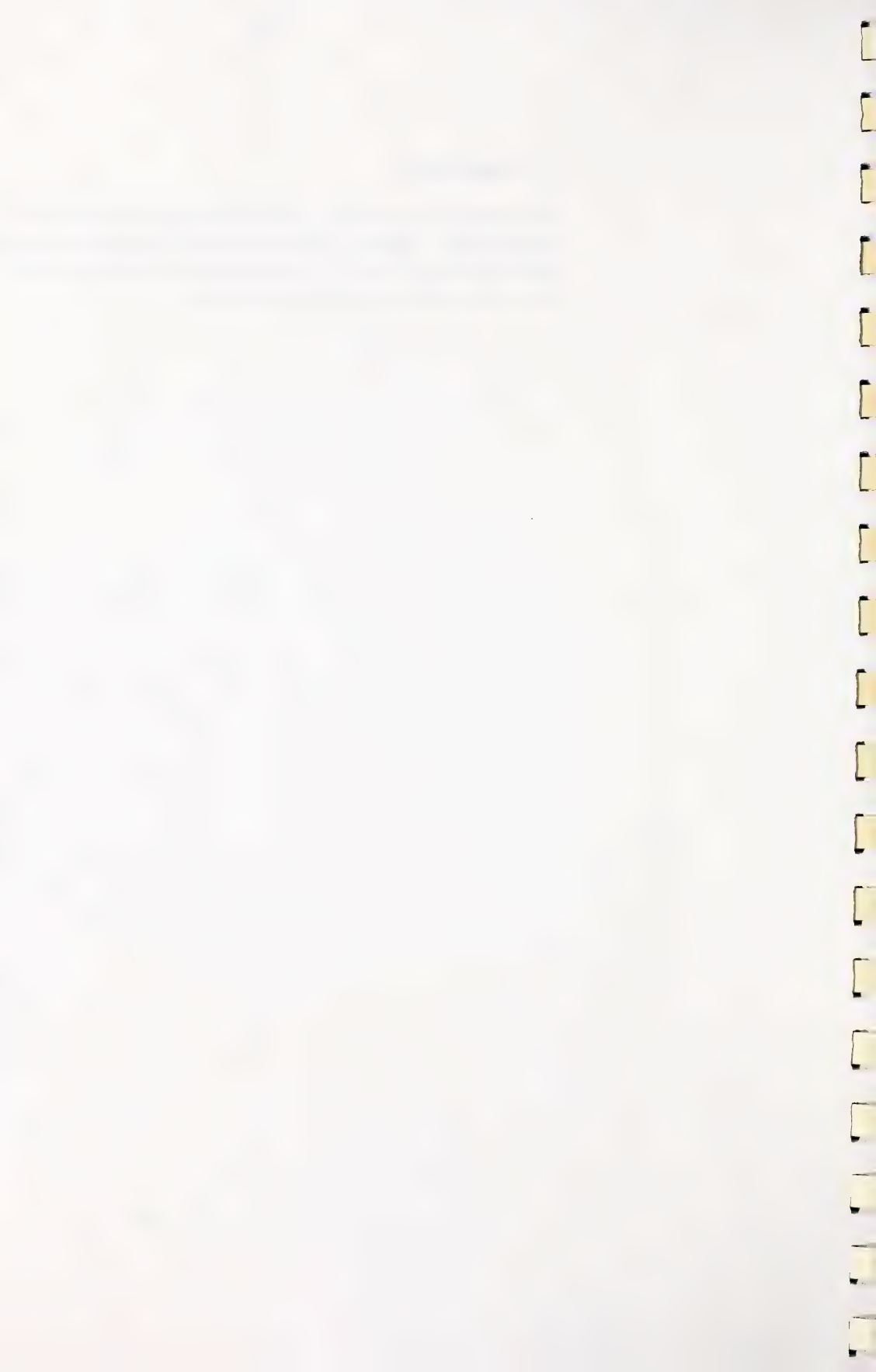
### **Strategy VI - Logo**

A family violence policing initiatives logo: "Family Violence Is a Crime", will be used to signify police initiatives on advertisements, letterhead, booklets, training manuals, policies, brochures and referral cards.



## **D. Conclusion**

The power of the media to influence public attitudes can not be understated. A strong, continuous public awareness campaign on the criminal nature of family violence will be designed to reach Albertans and let them know change is possible.



## **V. RESEARCH**

### **A. Introduction**

Accurate information is an essential precondition to making informed decisions as to proper police procedures. Clear identification of high risk target groups will assist in an appropriate focus for police and public education. Information on the incidence of family violence will allow for an evaluation of the policing initiatives.

### **B. Objectives**

- Stay abreast of developments in other jurisdictions.
- Form the basis for future planning.
- Determine the effectiveness of existing programs.
- Demonstrate to the public and police that the initiatives are working.
- Collect statistics on the incidence of family violence.
- Help police services better understand calls of family violence and the amount of time and resources required to handle them.

### **C. Initiatives**

#### **Strategy I - Review Practices from Other Jurisdictions**

Police policies, procedures, training and services to victims in major cities in Canada and United States will be resourced to identify innovative programs and practices.

Research evaluating the impact of charging policies and public awareness campaigns in other jurisdictions will be reviewed to determine their strategies and effectiveness.

This information will be useful in establishing the groundwork for many of the policing initiatives and will be catalogued for easy accessibility of information.



### **Strategy II - Mandatory Reports**

Data received from police services will be utilized to determine the incidence of family violence, the use of weapons, the abuse of alcohol/drugs, repeat calls, charges laid, arrest rates, withdrawal of charges and sentencing practices.

Analysis of this information will provide the basis for future directions for policing practices and public awareness campaigns.

### **Strategy III - Feedback From Victims Who Use Shelters in Alberta**

The Department of Family and Social Services require intake interviews be conducted with all women who use shelters. Part of the interview questionnaire relates to police intervention and the victim's satisfaction with such intervention.

This data was evaluated and a report prepared in April 1990.

This data will again be evaluated in 1992 to determine if there has been an increase in charges laid, services to victims and victim satisfaction.

### **Strategy IV - Public Survey**

A public survey will be conducted and analyzed to provide information regarding public reaction to the policing initiatives. Public surveys are helpful in establishing the most effective educational medium as well as increasing public awareness.

### **Strategy V - Status Report**

To sustain support and interest, it is essential that the Minister, senior officials of the Department of the Solicitor General, members of the advisory committee and the police services be kept apprised regarding the progress for each initiative. In order to keep all parties informed, a status report will be prepared on an annual basis.





## **D. Conclusion**

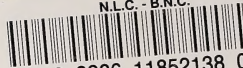
Research is necessary to design, implement and make necessary changes to programs. New information will lead to a better understanding of the dynamics of family violence, and consequently lead to better police intervention.

## D. Conclusion

Research is necessary to design, implement and evaluate change in practice. Few interventions will last for a long time. Understanding of the dynamics of family systems and the role of the family in the development of the child can lead to better practice interventions.



N.L.C. - B.N.C.



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